

## **Building Healthy Oral Habits – Tips for New Parents**

- Developing oral hygiene habits starts before your baby has teeth. Wiping your baby's gums after feeding with a clean, damp cloth will help your baby get used to having their mouth cleaned after eating.
- If you feel that your baby needs to sleep with a bottle or sippy cup, fill it with water only. Other liquids like juice or milk encourage the growth of bacteria which cause tooth decay.
- After feeding and mouth cleaning, lift your baby's lip to look for changes in the color of your baby's front teeth. White lines or spots, brown lines or spots or chips in the teeth may be signs of potential problems, which, if caught early, are easy to repair.
- As soon your baby's first tooth appears begin brushing with an infant or baby tooth brush. Brush in the morning and especially before bedtime. Lie your child down with their head well supported by a pillow, a couch, a bed or your lap. This improves your visibility and you will have TWO hands free with which to brush.
- Use a fluoride toothpaste. Use only a very small smear of toothpaste with each brushing. Fluoride in the toothpaste helps to harden the tooth mineral making it more resistant to acid. Keep the toothpaste tube out of baby's and children's reach.
- Change your child's toothbrush after each dental checkup (usually once every 6 months or so). If your child becomes ill, as most children do, either change the toothbrush after they recover to avoid re-infection OR disinfect the toothbrush in a dishwasher.
- Make tooth brushing fun. Sing songs, play hide and seek looking for dinosaurs in each others mouth, read stories about healthy teeth and visiting the dentist. But, most importantly, make sure YOU brush your child's teeth until they are old enough to WRITE their name correctly. That usually happens around grade 3!
- Your child's first dental check-up should occur by 12 months of age or within 6 months of the first tooth appearing. This well-baby visit is a great time to ask the dental team questions about your child's dental health.
- Healthy snacks are important for general health. Try to avoid acidic foods or foods containing sugar or starch between meals. Sticky snacks containing sugar (such as dried fruit) or starch (crackers, cookies, granola bars) are especially harmful. Some healthy snack choices include nuts and seeds, nut butters like peanut or almond, cheese, plain yogurt, popcorn, raw vegetables.
- Sweets - we all know they can cause cavities. But moms and dads need to know that it's not the amount of sweets our children eat but how often and when they eat them. Every time we eat something with sugar, the oral bacteria produce acid that can damage the teeth and this "attack" can last for up to 20 minutes each time! Try to give sweets only at the end of your child's meal.